

[The Hollifields]

Asheville Cotton Mill

Asheville, N.C.

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I. L. M.

THE HOLLIFIELDS

"What a beautiful thought I am thinking concerning the great speckled bird.

The great speckled bird in the Bible representing the great Church of God."

The doleful monotony of Grace Hollifield's voice spreads itself over the words of "The Great Speckled Bird" and hits discordantly against the plunkety notes of her mandolin and her father's banjo. Over line after line Grace's voice drags its way to tell the story of worldly opposition to "The Great Speckled Bird," and of the bird's ultimate victory. "They hate her because she is chosen They watch every move that she makes. They want to find fault in her teaching ...She is spreading her wings for a journey She will meet her dear Lord in the sky."

Sometimes six year old Edith joins her sister in her hymn singing, and her child-voice will rise in weird, strange tense to tell that there is room for all at the foot of the Cross.

Sometimes the Hollifields will gather on their small front porch and at other times in the dingy living room of their home on Factory Hill to play and sing hymns. Singing and playing are daily activities in the Hollifield home. On the porches of houses 2 nearby neighbors sit and listen, some with great liking and others with growing resentment Disapproval is

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of little consequence to the Hollifields because they consider it their duty as well as their pleasure to sing religious songs that others may hear and become converts. Only a few people on Factory Hill attend church, except during revival season, and for that reason the Hollifields sing with double seal.

Nine years ago when Jed and Evelyn moved to Factory Hill they joined the Salvation Army of Asheville and they have encouraged their children to accept the teachings of the organization. Last year they dedicated little Edith to its services and now on Saturday nights she joins her family and other members of the organization on the streets of Asheville to sing and to play on her tambourine. Tom, the oldest son who is now married, plays the violin and often comes from his house across the hill to join his family in their playing. "It ain't often you see 4 members of a family talented in music, is it?" Jed asks with pride.

Jed, born in Madison County, North Carolina, was five years old when his mother died. He was sent then to live with his aunt who owned a small farm near Pickens, South Carolina. There he worked until he was nineteen years old with never any hope of making more than a bare living. His aunt had six children and what few advantages she could provide were given to them.

During these years when he was growing up Jed thought often of his brother, Charley, two years older than he, who had been sent to live with an aunt in Gaffney, South Carolina. Word reached 3 Jed a few years after he went to his new home that Charley had run away and his relatives had not heard from him since. There were nights when he lay awake wondering what had become of his brother. He tried to hold fast to the belief that some kind person had given him a good home and that he and his brother would eventually be brought together again. But there were times when he was haunted with the harassing thought that Charley had died of hunger as he struggled on mile after mile on a journey that had no destination.

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Jed found very little affection in his aunt's household. He did not learn to like the farm and when he was nineteen he determined to make a new life for himself. He went to Greenville and there secured a job in the weave room of a cotton mill. Two years later he married Evelyn whose father had moved out of Madison County to Asheville Mill and later to Greenville. The mills needed hands in those days and Jed with his young wife moved from mill to mill, sometimes with the hope of betterment and sometimes because an overbearing superintendent made demands which his pride would not stand. "I don't mind doin' my work but I've always wanted to be treated like a man." he says.

One move took the Hollifields to Gastonia, North Carolina. On a Saturday afternoon not long after moving to Gastonia Jed was in the barber shop up-town looking through a newspaper, when he saw the name of Charley Hollifield signed to an advertisement of livestock for sale. He rushed home to tell his wife that at last he had discovered the whereabouts of his brother. Not wanting Jed to build too great a hope on his discovery Evelyn suggested that someone else might have the same name. Jed knew there was only one way to satisfy his mind. After a number of inquiries he found out that Charley Hollifield lived on a farm about seven miles from town. Jed tells his story as follows: "Hit was a strange feelin' ridin' out there to see the man who had the name that had stayed in my mind all them years. I knew it would be a awful disappointment if it turned out to be somebody else. When I got there Charley was settin' on the porch, and it never took a minute for me to make up my mind. Lookin' at him comin' forward to meet me it was just like lookin' in a mirror at myself. I think he must have knowed just as quick as I did that we were brothers. I set there for two or three hours talking with him while he told me how he crawled in the back of a apple wagon that had come down out of the mountains, and how the driver, not knowing that he was there until he was a good ways out of town, took him on home with him. He wasn't but nine then, but ever since he'd been at Aunt Mattie's he'd felt that she didn't want him and that she thought of him as nothin' but a burden since she had eight younguns of her own anyway. The driver kept him in his home for about a year. After that he worked out here and there, living with first one and then another until he was

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fifteen years old. Restlessness and dissatisfaction came on him again and he bummed his way to Texas. He worked there at odd jobs until he was seventeen, and then come back to North Carolina and stopped near Gastonia. He 5 got work on old man Thad Stone's place and when he was twenty-two he married the old man's daughter, Bonnie. When Mr. Stone died he left Bonnie a good piece of farmin' land and there her and Charley have been ever since. Charley has took advantage of his chance and he's made a fair livin' for his family. I shorely feel like God guided me in findin' my brother."

Jed moved to the Asheville Cotton Mill because the doctors advised a mountain climate for Evelyn. She has not been able to work for many years and the entire burden of his family's support rests with Jed, who now gets three days' work a week. Jed's two oldest sons are married but there are three children still at home. Grace is frequently ill and requires medical treatment.

Jed bears his responsibilities with a serenity which makes him at forty-six look not more than forty years of age. He discusses with perfectly controlled feeling his opinion of the mill at which he works. He thinks that the stretch-out system has put on him more work than is just but he realizes his own helplessness. "This is a ugly place to live," he says. "No roads, dirty unscreened houses and no yard for plantin' a few flowers. But a man that's got dependents would take a lot today before he'd quit his job because he knows as like as not he won't find another. It seems to us that work that all folks could have plenty of food and reasonable good clothes and a decent place to stay," he continues, lookin steadily at his listener. "They could, I know, if they wasn't so much selfishness in the world."

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Jed sits quietly for awhile, seeming to reflect on his own words. Presently he looks at the visitor and says, "Me and the girls will be glad to play you a piece if you like." "Edith, get your tambourine and help me and Grace with "Kneel at the Cross." They get their instruments and begin to play and sing. Jed's mind now seems free. His eyes are clear

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and bright as he sings: Jesus will meet you there, There is room for all at the foot of the Cross.”